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PREPARED STATEMENT OF THOMAS D. BOYATT

AMBASSADOR, U.S. EMBASSY

BOGOTA, COLOMBIA

BEFORE THE

PERMANENT SUBCOMMITTEE ON INVESTIGATIONS

COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENTAL AFFAIRS

UNITED STATES SENATE

FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 13, 1981

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I am pleased to appear before you today to discuss the role of the American Embassy in Bogota in our joint efforts with the Government of Colombia to control the flow of illicit drugs to the United States. Before getting into the details of the problem and our responses thereto, I would like to emphasize two fundamental factors:

First, the activities of Embassy Bogota in combatting narcotics are not confined to the State Department. On the contrary, there are 11 agencies of the United States Government represented at the Embassy and one of my responsibilities pursuant to law and presidential directive is to coordinate and manage the efforts of all of these elements in achieving U.S. anti-narcotics policy goals. In one way or another virtually every segment of the Embassy contributes and certainly our Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) contingent and our Narcotics Assistance Unit (NAU) are major contributors.

Second, the cornerstone of our international narcotics control program is cooperation with the governments of major producer and transit countries. Colombia is a major producer of marijuana and a major processor of cocaine and methaqualone. Therefore, what we do in Colombia is an integral part of overall U.S. activities. I welcome this opportunity to describe the operation of U.S. narcotics control policies and programs in Colombia.

Let me put the problem we face in context. Colombia produces approximately 70 to 80 percent of the illicit marijuana imported into the United States. The Drug Enforcement Administration estimates that 50,000 metric tons of marijuana could be grown and shipped from Colombia, primarily from the North coast, during 1981. Colombia is also the processing/distribution center for at least 50 percent of the cocaine HCL entering this country. Some coca leaf is cultivated in Colombia, but most cocaine transits from Peru and Bolivia as coca paste or base. In Colombia these derivatives are processed into cocaine HCL. The DEA estimates that 19-23 metric tons of cocaine HCL were exported from Colombia during 1980.

Within the past two years Colombia has become a major supplier of quaaludes destined for U.S. consumption, our best estimate being that 90 percent of the U.S. illicit market is supplied from Colombia. The raw material, methaqualone powder, is introduced by European suppliers into Colombia where it is diverted into illicit channels and entabletted.

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The Colombian drug traffic network is reputedly the best organized, best financed, and most ruthless in Latin America. Marijuana is smuggled to the United States primarily by marine vessel, cocaine and methaqualone by air. Reports are increasing that Colombian guerrilla groups are utilizing drug trafficking as a source of income to pay for arms shipments.

It is clear, then, that the problems are enormous. What has the United States Government been doing to deal with these problems in Colombia? Our various responses fall into two categories -- operational and developmental, both designed to substantially reduce (or stop) the flow of marijuana, cocaine and quaaludes to the United States.

Operational activities essentially are joint U.S. (DEA) and Colombia law enforcement endeavors designed to disrupt major trafficking networks. Direct DEA (or predecessor agency) presence began in Colombia in 1972 and has continued down to today. Making cases is one major front on which we fight to interdict the flow of illegal narcotics to the U.S.

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Developmental activities date back to 1973. From 1973 through FY 1981 the United States Government obligated approximately $32 million (including $16 million in FY 1980) for projects in Colombia. The goal of these projects has been, and is, to contribute to the upgrading of Colombian institutional capabilities in interdiction (and eradication), judicial processing, and intelligence collection pertaining to narcotics-related offenses, and in drug abuse prevention. The ultimate objective is to help the Government of Colombia to reach self-sufficiency in all technical and budgetary aspects of drug control and abuse. The United States' contribution has been in commodity support (almost 75 per cent of all assistance), technical aid, and training. Contributions of the Government of Colombia have included the necessary personnel and additional equipment. U.S. participation has been significant in terms of our worldwide narcotics control effort, but the financial commitment of Colombia has been even more substantial when viewed in the context of their limited resources. President Turbay's administration, which will hold office until August 1982, has been especially cooperative in our joint anti-drug activities. We hope this cooperation will continue in the future.

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Under a new Government of Colombia anti-narcotics strategy, the national police has now assumed primary responsibility for narcotics control. Thus, the major thrust of our program is with this agency which has selected, trained, and deployed more than 1,000 persons to the field in Special Anti-Narcotics Units (SANU's) since December 1980. The Colombian military, as chief coordinator for narcotics enforcement measures, is playing an operational and tactical support role and the air wing of the Attorney General's Office is providing additional aviation support.

As a consequence of these initiatives, marijuana seizures made by Colombian enforcement agencies from January through August of this year are up more than 300 percent over the same period last year, and methaqualone seizures are up 350 percent. Preliminary data on cocaine seizures for the same time frame indicated a downward trend. The GOC has diverted significant resources in response to USG requests to interdict marijuana and methaqualone on the North coast as a first priority during 1981. We hope to launch a major cocaine interdiction effort in 1982.

In spite of real successes we estimate that the current rate of marijuana seizures represents less than 10 per cent of the total entering the United States from Colombia. The figures with respect to cocaine and quaaludes are very probably in the same range. The fact that improvements in absolute terms do not translate into real success in relative terms underlines what I regard to be the essential fact in combatting narcotics. That fact is that the closer our programs are to eliminating the source of the narcotics (plants or chemicals), the more successful and the less expensive our programs are. Thus, I would argue that eradication of marijuana and coca plants and elimination of chemical flows would be the most efficacious approach of the United States Government. As the experience of Mexico in eradicating its marijuana and poppy cultivations demonstrates, eradication is the best way. The Government of Colombia has begun a manual coca eradication program. Some in Colombia believe that a marijuana eradication program based on aerial spraying of herbicides would be the best approach. Before the United States Government can pursue efforts to convince the Government of Colombia to initiate such an eradication program two prerequisites must be met:

The Percy Amendment, which has prevented United States Government participation in paraquat herbicidal eradication programs of marijuana abroad, must be repealed; and

The United States must begin spraying the extensive U.S. domestic cultivations of marijuana before we can creditably ask foreign governments to do the same.

The above prerequisites must be met before the United States can negotiate a joint campaign of both interdiction and eradication. I believe that such a parallel approach could substantially reduce the flow of illicit drugs from Colombia to the United States.

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